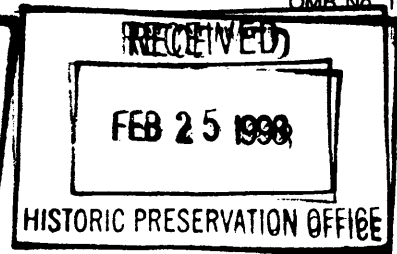


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



1064

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Levoy Theatre

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 126-130 North High Street

NA ☐ not for publication

city or town Millville City

☐ vicinity

state New Jersey

code NJ

county Cumberland

code 011

zip code 08332

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources /DSHPO
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall

8-14-98

The Levoy Theatre

Name of Property

Cumberland, New Jersey

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Theatre

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant

Work in Progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Late Gothic Revival

Art Deco/Moderne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concealed on exterior

walls brick

concrete

roof asphalt

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

The Levoy Theatre
Name of Property

Cumberland, New Jersey
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations N / A
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ART AND ARCHITECTURE
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1927-1947

Significant Dates

1927

1939

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

William Wrifford, General Contractor

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N / A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:

Levoy Theatre Preservation Society
Millville Historical Society

The Levoy Theatre
Name of Property

Cumberland, New Jersey
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one Millville, NJ Quad

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18	496602	4360590
Zone	Easting	North	ing

3			
Zone	Easting	North	ing

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Joseph H. Pierce, Jr. Director of Conservation

organization Levoy Theatre Preservation Society date February 23, 1998

street & number 618 E. Main Street telephone (609) 825-6557

city or town Millville state NJ zip code 08332

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Levoy Theatre Preservation Society, Inc.

street & number P.O. Box 640 telephone 609-825-3559

city or town Millville state NJ zip code 08332

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County, Millville, New Jersey

DESCRIPTION

The Levoy Theatre is a Classical Revival style theatre building located in the industrial city of Millville, New Jersey. It is located on the west side of High Street in the heart of the downtown commercial district. It is a large L-shaped building with a beige brick facade complete with marquee spelling "LEVOY," and symmetrical fenestration of one large Gothic Revival window flanked by two smaller Classical Revival windows. The remaining walls are of red brick, with stone or concrete foundations. There is a gable roof over the auditorium portion of the building. Over the stage lies a flat roof. There are two main floors to the theatre, including a mezzanine and balcony, but a small third floor encompasses the projection booth. The auditorium is fairly narrow but very long. The interior reflects both its original style, Classical Revival, as well as later Art Deco alterations. Under the stage area there are eight original vaudevillian-era dressing rooms. The theatre is currently vacant, and has been closed since 1974. It is in a deteriorated condition, but most parts of the building, including the auditorium, continue to carry historic integrity in terms of design, setting, materials, and workmanship. The theatre carries historic integrity for both Classical Revival and Art Deco architecture.

The property is less than half an acre, and the Levoy Theatre occupies almost all of the property. There are no other structures on the property; there is only a very small empty lot towards the northwest of the theatre. The property is a fairly narrow one that extends westward from High Street (front entrance of the theatre) about two-thirds the width of the city block. Near the back the property extends northward to Pine Street, encompassing the small empty lot as well as part of the theatre. There is a narrow alley along the south side of the building between the theatre and the old Fath Department Store. The surrounding commercial area encompasses mostly late-nineteenth century to early-twentieth century structures, many large ones, in both height and width. Many of these surrounding buildings have been altered, resulting in lost historic significance. Some retain their integrity, including the Levoy Theatre.

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**Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County, Millville, New Jersey**

PRINCIPLE FACADE & MARQUEE

The front (east) facade clearly displays the Levoy's Classical Revival and Art Deco architecture. Although the building is fairly narrow, the facade encompasses the entire width of the building, making it quite large when compared with neighboring buildings. The theatre facade is also very tall, one of the tallest in the downtown, equivalent to about three to four stories high. The facade is divided horizontally by a large marquee just above the first floor.

The ground floor of the building facing the High Street sidewalk was substantially changed circa 1960 when the original lobby area was reduced in size by two-thirds to incorporate two small retail commercial spaces (the southern two-thirds), leaving only a small lobby/refreshment area for the theatre. Although the north and south sides of the ground floor facade are flush with the main building, the middle portion of the ground floor, including all three entrances, is indented several feet. The retail stores have aluminum and glass doors surrounded by large glass and aluminum windows, a familiar look for retail establishments. The northern third of the front ground floor, the theatre entrance, is presently composed of two aluminum/glass doors sitting to the left of the present ticket booth. What appears to be falsified marble plastic sheeting has been applied around the ticket window to give the appearance of real marble (date applied unknown). The previous appearance of the ground floor, before the 1960 renovation, included having the ticket booth in the center of the front of the building, flanked by three-pairs of half-moon double doors on either side. Above the doors and ticket booth, lying just under the marquee overhang, was a message board, stretching the entire width of the front of the building, although only two rows tall. It was also used to advertise events showing at the theatre. This message board no longer remains.

The present Levoy Theatre marquee displays five large metal letters in the center spelling "LEVOY" offset on either side by two lighted glass panels with metal tracks for large metal letters

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Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County, Millville, New Jersey

which are used to advertise upcoming events. The message panels extend diagonally from the center of the marquee toward the edge of the building. The present marquee replaced earlier models in August, 1939, when the Warner Brothers Corporation cosmetically renovated the Levoy, inside and out. The new marquee is the only change that Warner Brothers made to the outside of the building. It has elements of Art Deco, mainly streamlining; however, it was modified in the 1950s and lost some of its more striking Art Deco features, including metal chevrons. It was at this time that the message boards were made diagonal instead of perpendicular to the brick facade and to High Street. The "LEVOY" letters are capable of being lit with neon tube lighting. There is also neon track lighting surrounding the message boards. The neon has not functioned since the theatre has closed.

The present facade, above the marquee, is a result of the 1927 enlargement of the Levoy by the Handle and Rovner Amusement Corporation which created the bulk of the present day Levoy. The original Levoy goes back to 1908, when it was a much smaller building, used for silent flickering films in a small first-floor showing room, and for dancing on the second floor. Located on the same site as today's Levoy, the theatre was enlarged in 1912 to incorporate a larger stage, wrap-around balcony, and large facade. Photos of the 1912 Levoy facade show that it somewhat resembles the present Levoy in a couple of ways: (1) Classical Revival architecture; (2) three-bay fenestration with large center window. There was no electronic marquee at that time; instead, a temple-like projecting pediment supported by two ionic columns served as an elaborate entrance. This was again changed in 1927 by further enlargements and enhancements.

Above the present-day marquee, the Levoy facade is composed of beige brick, which acts only as a facing on the front facade. The facade is divided into three bays. A large center window with a rounded top and keystone is composed of three different levels. The middle and lower level at one time were exactly alike: a row of three individual windows, each a six-over-six double-hung sash window, with translucent glass panels. Presently, the middle level remains this way, while the lower level windows have been replaced

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Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County, Millville, New Jersey

by modern vinyl, one-over-one double-hung sash windows. This occurred when the building owner converted the second floor mezzanine area into a residential apartment in the mid-1980s. The upper level of this large center window is composed of Gothic Revival elements which remain to this day. Just behind the Gothic elements lies a set of three six-over-six windows identical to those of the middle level. The Gothic elements include overlying divisions which give the appearance of the top of a large tracery window.

On each side of the large center window is a smaller window, each topped by a Classical Revival pediment. These windows have also been replaced by vinyl replacement windows, just as the lower level of the center window has; the Classical Revival pediment has not been disturbed, however.

Several feet above the two side windows are two large decorative plaques, symmetrically placed. The plaques are rectangularly shaped, with four protruding corner blocks. The inner portion of the plaque contains a decorative carved design which has Classical Revival influences. The center of the design appears to be in the shape of an urn, surrounded by a sun-burst like design and a scrolling border.

At one time the front facade of the Levoy offered four wooden doric pilasters, symmetrically placed between the center window and the two smaller windows, and between the small windows and the outer edge of the facade. Presently, only two wooden beams remain in the place of each missing pilaster. The pilasters at one time were topped by a large false wooden eave in the shape of a Classical Revival entablature, complete with small and large dentils on the cornice, a bare frieze, and an architrave just above the top of the pilaster capitals. The entire eave was removed in 1972 due to the eave's dangerous condition of deterioration: it was leaning away from the facade, in danger of falling. The city government mandated its removal. The pilasters were removed within the next few years. A large patch of red and white brick has been exposed due to the removal of the eave. This brick underlies the beige brick covering. Also at one time there was a large "LEVOY

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Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County, Millville, New Jersey

THEATRE" sign lying above the eave, very close to the top of the facade. It has also been removed, but at an unknown date.

REMAINING EXTERIOR, BEYOND PRINCIPLE FACADE

The basic shape of the Levoy Theatre building is in a backwards "L," with the rear (stage) area of the building carrying the lower extension of the "L." The extension is north, towards an empty lot and Pine Street. The structure is of red brick above ground, with a stone foundation. Although the structure of the building contains a brick structure from both the 1912 and 1927 construction works on the theatre, the brick pattern is identical, being 1:9 Common Bond. It is easily discernible where the rear of the 1912 building is and where the 1927 extension began due to a vertical line of mortar between the eastern, older portion, and the western, newer portion. This line approximately lies where the lower "L" extension starts. The southern facade has very few openings. There are emergency exit doorways from the auditorium that lead out to the alley, but many of them have been bricked up. There is also a metal fire escape staircase leading down from a double doorway emergency exit off the balcony of the theatre.

The 1912 brickwork on the south side is still in good condition, with some minor cracking, spalling, and moss growth. The rear, 1927 brickwork is in very good condition, with relatively little cracking, spalling, or moss growth. There are two openings on the rear of the building, a doorway, and a large prop-entrance for loading directly onto the backstage area. Both are currently boarded up. There is also a metal coal chute covering on the rear of the building that covers the chute, which leads down to the boiler room.

On the north side, the 1912 brickwork has been covered completely by a concrete material. It is unknown when this occurred. The 1927 brickwork on the north side has not been covered by this concrete, but has recently (1996) been sealed by a red brick sealant on the lower-third of the side, facing the empty lot and Pine Street. Two houses once sat on the empty lot, and

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Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County, Millville, New Jersey

were connected to the theatre. When they were demolished, some damage was done to the brick facing on the Levoy. This is where the sealant was applied. There is only one opening on the northern side of the theatre, another emergency exit leading from the auditorium. The exit is sunken down below ground level, equal to the lowest level of the sloping auditorium floor where the exit leads from. High above this exit on the exterior wall is what appears to be an exhaust opening in the wall for the heating/air conditioning unit. It is shielded by a sloping metal overhanging roof, but the opening can be seen from below.

The 1927 portion of the building is taller than the 1912 building, mainly due to the fact that the most of the 1927 construction contains the stage and backstage area, which includes a tall loft area. There is a flat roof above the stage area, and an asphalt-covered, low-pitched gable roof covering the long auditorium area. Several metal vents line the peak of the gable.

INTERIOR

Starting on the ground floor, front side of the building, there are three divisions: two retail stores and the theatre entrance corridor. The store spaces are plain, and built level to the entrance even though the floor of the theatre was built to slope. The theatre entrance corridor is dominated by the remaining marble and cast-iron balcony staircase which is flush against the north wall, lying to the right of the corridor when you first walk in, just past the exterior ticket booth. The staircase is constructed of marble, including a strip of in-laid marble in the north wall to complement the staircase, running parallel to the staircase extending up about three feet off the stairs. The railing is constructed of cast-iron. The stairs have been carpeted, but overall it is in good condition. A matching staircase, along the southern wall, was removed when the retail shops were constructed, circa 1960.

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Continuing along the first-floor corridor, beyond the staircase, there is a space where the concession stand was once located, one that was used in the 1960s and 1970s. The walls in the corridor are covered with several different types of material, including wooden paneling, red velvet, and cloth tapestries that match ones in the auditorium. The corridor moves to the right of the concession stand to lead to the only remaining doorway entrance to the orchestra level of the auditorium. This doorway still retains a set of double doors in the half-moon design, similar to the exterior doors of the lobby after the 1939 Warner Brothers renovation. These are the only half-moon doors remaining in the building. The doorway is flush with the rear wall of the orchestra level of the auditorium space. It runs in a straight line from the doorway (the north end of the building) to the south wall. This wall is located approximately eight to twelve feet behind the overhang of the balcony above. This wall also acts as the rear wall of the retail shops. Originally, the orchestra level of the auditorium extended further back from where this wall now stands, adding more seating space. The present wall was installed when the retail shops were put in, decreasing the seating capacity of the theatre.

MEZZANINE AREA

The lobby staircase leads up to the second-floor mezzanine area, which once served as the lounge/restrooms area of the theatre, as well as the access to the balcony seating area. This area was converted into a residential apartment in the late 1980s by owner Blaze Diegidio, Jr. There are several rooms to the apartment, but no historic integrity remains from the earlier use as a lounge/restroom. The balcony has not been altered, as will be described later.

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AUDITORIUM

The auditorium of the theatre has endured the least amount of change in the entire building since it closed to the public in 1974. It retains much of the architecture, ornamentation, and detailing from the 1927 enlargement and 1939 renovation of the Levoy that make it significant.

The flooring of the orchestra level is a sloping surface of narrow wood planking. Currently, much of the flooring is bare, except for about 150 of the theatre's old seats. There are two main types of seats remaining in the theatre: older, black iron seats with red velvet cushions, and newer, gray metal seats with pink cushions. The older seats date back to the Warner Brothers renovation, and are located within the first seven to eight rows from the stage. The newer seats occupy the rows of seats closer to the rear wall. The older seats appear to be in better condition than the newer ones.

All along the south side wall of the auditorium there are emergency exit doorways, although many of them have been covered from the inside by wood paneling. Some areas of the low part of this wall are exposed, showing the stone foundation of the building. This portion of the foundation dates to 1912. The side walls of the theatre are covered with a couple of layers of cloth tapestries, which cover a thick padding which most likely acted as a sound barrier and enhancer to improve the acoustics of the theatre. There is a wooden beam skeleton that acts to hold the padding in place. Behind the padding and wooden beams lies the exterior brick wall. The base of the wall, rising up to about four feet off the floor, consists of a different covering, usually red velvet or wooden paneling. Above this base trim lies the tapestries. The earliest tapestry, thus the undercoating, consists of a design installed during the 1939 Warner Brothers renovation. The bulk of the design consists of a crisscrossing pattern of horizontal and vertical lines which form a checkerboard-like pattern. At the lower end of the tapestries there are two horizontal blue lines which emphasize the streamlining effect of the pattern, which was installed to bring "modern" streamlining

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into the theatre in 1939. At the center of each tapestry, as its centerpiece, lies an illustration of opposing sides of the world--a picture of the globe. The northern wall globe illustrates the Eastern Hemisphere, while the southern wall illustrates the Western Hemisphere. In addition, between the crisscrossing lines pattern and the velvet base covering on the wall there is a strip of what appears to be blue velvet that curves at a ninety-degree angle up toward the ceiling as it approaches the stage end of the wall.

The current condition of these tapestries varies. Since the northern wall has received less water damage than the southern wall, the northern wall tapestries are in much better condition, with all parts intact, although dirty and faded. The tapestries along the southern wall are highly deteriorated, due to water damage suffered due to severe leaks in the roof on that side of the building. The globe is intact on that side, but highly discolored, as is the surrounding crisscross pattern. The worst leak in the building is located just west of the globe (toward the stage). At the position where water cascades down from the leak, the tapestry has completely been lost in a vertical strip about three feet wide.

In the 1950s a second tapestry was installed to cover the 1939 style. It consists of a repeating pattern of gold and brown curvilinear shapes that switch directions in alternating horizontal rows. This tapestry has almost completely fallen down, although it still remains posted in some of the more isolated places of the auditorium.

The front of the auditorium is dominated by a large stage, proscenium archway, and flanking sets of ornamental pilasters, carvings, archways, and art work. This area was constructed in 1927, with Classical Revival designs. At the base of the stage there is an orchestra pit that currently holds a temporary stage-extension platform. It is unknown when this platform was added. On either side of the orchestra pit are matching sets of ionic style pilasters, positioned at a sharp angle to the stage and proscenium. There are two pilasters on each side of the stage, positioned about ten feet apart. The space in between, now filled

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in by a red velvet covering, once acted as a space for two levels of box seats, from 1927. The box seats were removed in the 1939 renovation. The angle of the box seating area provided a view that could see the audience as well as the stage. The proscenium and box seating area act together as an indented space when viewed from the seating area. Connecting the box seating area with the nearest main wall are two walls which act to box-in the old box-seating area. To give access from the audience to the box-seating area are two twin doorways which are at the base of the connecting wall. The doorways are arched, and once had a curtain draped over them to act as a cover. There are also two more matching pilasters, one on each of the connecting walls. There is an entablature just above the pilasters on either side of the stage. The frieze is ornamented with a carving of a garland of laurel leaves, in the Classical Revival style.

The proscenium arch of the stage consists of two vertical borders connected by a horizontal beam that connects to the vertical posts by an inverted curve. At the top center of the proscenium there is an ornamental keystone shaped in an oval. More Classical Revival detailing lines the border of the archway, in what appears to be another floral design.

The highlight of the front of the auditorium lies on a curved portion of the ceiling just above the proscenium and over the orchestra pit area. A large illustrated carving, possibly of plaster, tin, wood, or some other material not yet determined, lies within the center of this area. It consists of a center oval which contains a carving of three women who appear to be dressed as Greek or Roman goddesses with outstretched arms. It may be possible that these are three of the Greek Muses, the goddesses presiding over the arts. Flanking either side of the oval are winged cherubs. A side view of the cherubs is given, symmetrically placed with the cherub's face looking away from the oval.

BALCONY AND PROJECTION BOOTH

At the rear of the auditorium there is a large wooden balcony,

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installed in 1927. Prior to 1927, the older Levoy had a wrap-around balcony that extended along the sides of the theatre wall toward the proscenium area. The current balcony lies well back from the stage area, with an inwardly curved facing. The facing is about two feet from top to bottom, and has an ornamental wooden design on it, similar to the work around the proscenium and stage. The design also features a floral pattern.

For each row of the balcony the floor rises one step. The floor is constructed of wood planking, similar to the orchestra floor. The balcony is split horizontally into a lower and upper half, with a walkway crossing the center of it. The walkway is serviced by two balcony entrances, at the north and south walls. The entrances are basically an extension of the main balcony staircases which originally came from the lobby. An inclined walkway (no steps) extends up the walkway from a doorway of the north end of the mezzanine, while a staircase extends from a doorway at the southern end of the mezzanine up to the balcony. At the level of this center walkway on the balcony is the only emergency exit doorway, along the south wall. It is a double doorway of metal doors. Above the doorway is an Art Deco "EXIT" sign, installed in 1939. These exit signs, which can be lighted, are periodically found at a few exits around the auditorium.

Although many of the seats have been removed from the balcony also, many seats remain, usually in almost-complete rows. They are the same black-iron and red-velvet seats that remain in the first rows of the orchestra level, installed by Warner Brothers in 1939. Also remaining from the 1939 renovation is aisle carpeting, for three aisles that run from the lower railing, up to the back wall. The design of the carpeting has a dark blue background, with a diamond pinstripe pattern of connecting diamonds. In the center of each diamond shape there is a four-prong star. Much of the carpeting remains intact, but very dirty.

The upper, rear wall of the balcony has one entrance, the one leading to the projection booth and two rooms which flank it. There are several small windows facing out from the projection booth, for the films and for spotlighting. The doorway is located

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at the top of the northern walkway. It leads into a complex of three small rooms used by the projectionist. Two of them have concrete flooring. The first room, with a wooden floor, was used for storage mainly, but also served as the projectionist's bathroom, for the remnants of a toilet remain there. This room also gives access to the loft of the building, through a very small door above the main doorway. The loft of the building is very large; it provides access to the roof trussing system. The projection booth itself is located two steps up from the first room, towards the center of the building. It is a fairly small room, but holds much projection equipment. Two large vintage motion picture projectors remain in the booth. They are twin 35mm, reel-to-reel, carbon arc projectors which date back to the 1939 Warner Brothers renovation. These are very rare for theatres today. The use of "platter" projection systems (which modern theatres use now) only came into popular usage after the Levoy closed in 1974, thus the projectors were never removed for a modern replacement. They remain in repairable condition. Also located in the main room of the projection booth is the sound machine, for use with sound motion pictures, several metal reels, and other tools for use by the projectionist. In addition, there is a chair located here that was once located in the box seats of the theatre, along side the stage and proscenium. As mentioned earlier, these box seats were removed in 1939 to modernize the appearance of the theatre.

Beyond the main projection booth room there is another small room which holds much of the mechanical and electrical equipment, such as mechanical light dimmers, breaker boxes, and two very large power generators. There is one small window in this room, covered by a piece of wood. The walls of this room are plaster on metal sheathing, and are in a deteriorated condition due to water damage from a roof leak just above the small window.

CEILING

The ceiling of the auditorium is also highly ornamented, constructed of pressed tin tiles and molding. There are several

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square blocks and a few circles which once acted as lighting fixtures and an anchor for chandeliers when they were first constructed in 1927. They are in a symmetrical pattern of three lines, from the front of the auditorium back to the rear of the balcony. The largest ornament of the ceiling is a large circle which contains a small circle with lines branching out from it. At the center of the small circle there is a small hole where the Levoy's largest chandelier was once located. In a regular pattern, extending from the large circle in a straight line towards the rear of the balcony, are three medium-sized squares with a circular encrusted floral pattern within them which extends down several inches as it comes together in a plateau in the center. The north and south rows of ceiling fixtures are identical, composed of small rectangular square with enclosed circular patterns which do not extend down like the larger ones in the center row. They also contain a space in the center which once held smaller sized chandeliers. The two rear squares still retain a small lighting fixture, a blue, silver, and gold circular fixture which hangs down by a thin metal tube several inches long. There are three of these squares along the north and south rows along the ceiling.

When the ceiling meets the north and south walls of the theatre, the ceiling curves downward a few feet with a tin lining. Most of the ceiling is still in very good condition; the only serious damage is located where the large leak on the south wall lies, and that damage is only on the curved portion that wraps down along the upper part of the south wall. Unfortunately, in this area some of this curved portion has begun to peel away and droop down.

BACKSTAGE

The entire backstage area, lower level, and side rooms are part of the building which was extended in 1927. The backstage area is extremely tall, constructed of cement block and brick. The cement block is only visible on the interior of the building. Near the top of the backstage area there is a large catwalk area constructed of wooden planks. The ceiling of the backstage area is

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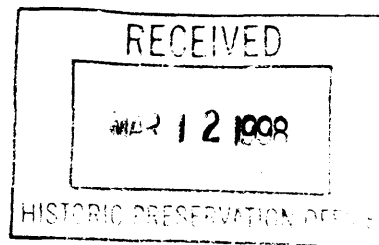
Levoy Theatre
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flat, but there is also a glass skylight. The wooden flooring of the stage and backstage area is extremely deteriorated due to water damage suffered over the past twenty years from a very leaky roof above. Current backstage items include a large speaker system for the theatre's sound system, rope rigging systems, old theatre curtains, and other miscellaneous backstage equipment. There is a large wooden loading door on the rear wall used for loading props in and out of the backstage area.

There is a staircase at the rear of the stage that leads downstairs to a complex of rooms, including a corridor of dressing rooms, the boiler room, a utility room, and the pipe organ chamber. There are about eight small dressing rooms located on the corridor, once used for vaudeville actors. Each room has a wooden, five-panel door. The rooms are plastered, and once had pressed-tin ceilings also. Almost all of the ceilings, and some of the plaster walls, have deteriorated due to water damage from the above leaky roof, but some patterns can be identified from what remains. Some rooms contains small porcelain sinks, and one room contains a large pump that was used as the theatre's "scientific air-conditioning" system by drawing cold water from the ground to feed the system. Two larger rooms lie at opposite ends of the corridor, the boiler room and a utility room. The boiler room, at the north end of the corridor, contains a very large boiler once capable of burning coal and oil. The utility room contains what appears to be the remainder of some electrical circuit boxes and piping systems.

A corridor runs from the main corridor towards the front of the stage area, which leads to an auditorium entrance (to the orchestra pit) and, further along, to the pipe organ chamber. Although the \$30,000 pipe organ, which was installed in 1927, was removed many years ago, some connection remnants, such as large tubes capable of carrying air vents, remain today in the room.

In addition to the sub-stage rooms, there are also a few rooms to the north and north-east (right) side of the stage. One room, just adjacent to the stage area, contains a large wall rack with many shelves. A former projectionist of the theatre identified it as the rack once used to hold the Levoy marquee letters on while



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not in use on the marquee. Beyond this room there is another room, which also acts as an emergency exit corridor from the auditorium. The room has an exit door which leads to Pine Street, to the north side of the building. Plaster walls, and wooden floors have greatly deteriorated in this area of the building due to water damage.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Levoy Theatre, originally built in 1908, is significant under two areas of the National Register Criteria, areas A and C.

The Levoy Theatre meets Criterion A because of its representation of the widespread building of grand theatres in the early twentieth century to house vaudeville and the boom of motion pictures at that time. It contributes to the area of significance **Entertainment and Recreation** because it was built solely for these purposes in the town of Millville, New Jersey, while continuously entertaining patrons in the Millville area for over sixty-five years. It was important to Millville in its period of significance, 1927-1948, because it was the town's main and best constant source of top quality entertainment during that time. The Levoy Theatre is a good example of an historic downtown theatre in a small, industrial working class American town.

The theatre meets National Register Criterion C because of its outstanding **Architecture**. Although slightly deteriorated, interior decorations features on ceilings and walls relate to the time period of the early twentieth century and the now rare downtown theatre. The featured style is Classical Revival, typical of grand early twentieth century public buildings. Gothic Revival and Art Deco styles have also been incorporated into the theatre's design, although to a lesser extent. It is by far the best example of this type of architecture in the Millville area. In addition to the architecture, certain technical/mechanical systems within the theatre contribute to its significance, including the use

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and continued existence of two large vintage 35 mm motion picture projectors from the 1930s, and the use of "Scientific Air Conditioning" by use of a large water pump situated underneath the stage area.

Historical Background and Significance

The town of Millville, New Jersey, (population near 26,000 in 1990), located on the Maurice River, fifteen miles north of the Delaware Bay, forty miles southwest of Philadelphia, and forty miles west of Atlantic City was settled in the early 1800s and has always been a working class town due to its numerous glass factories that have been continuously running since 1806.¹ The surrounding abundance of silica sand and timber for furnaces contributed to making Millville one of the largest glass producing towns in south Jersey.

The presence of thousands of working class citizens called for a need of entertainment and recreation in this time of strenuous labor demands. This need was cured by many small parks and clubs at first, but soon the growing interest of vaudeville and "moving pictures" was answered by William Somers. Somers had previously been very successful running several entertainment facilities in Atlantic City and saw the opportunity of opening a theatre in a working class town such as Millville.² Somers opened the first Levoy on 9 January 1908. Costing approximately \$12,000 to construct, it was a small, two story structure with a small auditorium on the first floor and a dance floor on the second.³ It was so successful that in 1912 Colonel Ellsworth Shaw enlarged the theatre for Somers to include a wrap-around balcony and a larger stage.⁴

The Levoy's importance to Millville and its working class citizens continued to grow into the 1920s to a point that Morris Handle and AJ Rovner, founders and partners of the Handle and Rovner Amusement Corporation in Camden County, New Jersey,⁵ bought the Levoy in 1927 and enlarged it to its present size.⁵ This included constructing the huge Classical Revival facade, enlarging

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the stage again (to a size once quoted by the Millville Daily Republican as being "one of the largest stages in the east"), increasing the balcony and orchestra seating capacity to 2,000, enlarging the lobby and mezzanine lounge, and redecorating the entire theatre by bringing in huge chandeliers, a \$30,000 pipe organ, marble and cast iron balcony staircases, and carving ornate moldings and fixtures throughout.⁶

Movies now shared the stage with vaudeville, but in 1930 when the Warner Brothers Corporation took over the theatre's operation, the former began to dominate the Levoy.⁷ Warner Brothers also initiated a large renovation in 1939 which made the Levoy into a "movie palace". The interior was slightly changed, such as removal of the chandeliers, box seats, and "antiquated" wall tapestries from 1927.⁸ New wall tapestries included two huge representations of the world on opposite sides of the auditorium. In addition, the marquee was replaced by a neon Art Deco model with large panels for the advertisement of coming attractions. "Scientific Air Conditioning" was added as a modern amenity, as well as a mechanical updating of the movie projectors and sound system, and an enlargement of the movie screen.⁹ "Scientific Air Conditioning" was accomplished by the addition of a large water pump located in one of the dressing rooms below the stage area. It drew cold water from deep underground which air from large fans would blow across to provide cool air ventilation to the audience.

Throughout its period of significance, 1908-1948, the Levoy exemplified the grand downtown movie theatre that helped define early twentieth century entertainment and recreation. The movie was an American past time and played a very important part in the ways of life of the common person in this era. The Levoy served Millville in this respect to the swarms of working class citizens in town who continually filled its seats up.

This period of significance is based upon the time in America that these downtown theatres were the main source of entertainment: from the advent of "moving pictures" to the development and popularity of television. It is also based upon the times and includes the times that the Levoy had its major enlargement and

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renovation, its significant dates of 1927 and 1939. These dates are significant because these are the two dates of the major renovations that shape what the Levoy currently looks like, relating to National Register Criterion C. The building's whole size and shape manifested from the 1927 enlargement, along with the major ornamental features such as the lighting fixtures on the ceiling, the carvings and moldings surrounding the stage, and the exterior facade features that relate to Classical Revival art and architecture. The best example of this significant art is a large carving of (possibly) three Greek Muses that lies on a curved portion of the ceiling above the front of the stage and seating area. All of it still remains in fairly good condition even though the theatre has been closed for over twenty years. The 1939 renovation is best represented by the wall tapestries of the world (their condition is decent, but deteriorating quickly due to extreme water damage) and the present Art Deco marquee of the five, four foot tall, neon letters spelling L-E-V-O-Y inbetween two large panels where movie titles would be shown.

In the early 1960s there was a detrimental renovation that reduced the size of the lobby by two-thirds (the space was converted into two stores) along with the removal of the south set of marble balcony steps from 1927 (the north set is extant). The only damage done to the auditorium portion of the Levoy by this renovation was some reduction in seating capacity on the opera level. Due to this renovation, the front, lower level portion of the building lost some of its story telling ability and significant art and architecture; however, the auditorium lost a minimal amount and still is very capable of telling the story of early American theatres, the Levoy's importance to Millville for entertainment and recreation, and the characteristics and traits of Classical Revival architecture of the time.

In the 1980s (after the theatre's closing), however, another renovation occurred. The owner destroyed the original mezzanine lounge area on the second floor to convert into a residential apartment, therefore eliminating all historic integrity in that part of the building. But once again no detrimental effect was felt by the auditorium area.

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The exterior of the Levoy has also changed slightly since the period of significance. When part of the lobby was converted into two stores in the early 1960s, the appearance of the exterior ground floor of the Levoy changed as well as the interior. The ticket booth (originally in the front center of the building) was moved to the north end of the building, and the theatre entrance doors were reduced in number. In 1972 a large wooden ornamental eave and four wooden pilasters that all represented the Classical Revival architecture were removed for safety reasons because they were leaning away from the facade, in danger of falling.¹⁰ The large Gothic Revival center window, two symmetric adjacent windows, and two ornamental carved plaques still remain to tell the story of the Levoy. The 1939 marquee still remains, although altered some in the 1950s; however, its neon no longer functions. Overall, enough does remain to convey its architectural significance.

The Levoy closed in 1974 after a long battle against low revenues and new competition outside of downtown with new multiplex cinemas. Although it has been closed for over twenty years, it still retains most of its historic attributes and integrity. This fact makes it not only important in illustrating the history of Millville, but even more crucial in helping spearhead a restoration and comeback attempt that has been started by the non-profit Levoy Theatre Preservation Society, Inc.

The advent of the moving picture along with vaudeville became the major entertainment and recreation in towns and cities all across America in the early twentieth century. This trend affected Millville tremendously because of the determination of its citizens to build and patronize one of the grandest theatres in south Jersey to house this important trend. Millville citizens were highly affected by the Levoy and the movies--everyone had been there at one time or another and had that trait in common, especially in a town of working class citizens who didn't have enough money to do much else than see a movie or watch a comedy act. The Levoy was Millville's center of activity, center of entertainment, and center of attention, like many other theatres in working class towns across America that are so rare now.

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The Classical Revival architecture on the exterior and interior of the Levoy is a great example of that revival in Millville. Usually only grand, decorative public buildings had this style of the early twentieth century and now are fairly rare in small town America. The Levoy is the only true large Classical Revival building in Millville. The interior workmanship is especially noteworthy for this area. After the 1927 enlargement, the theatre's ornamentation was compared to works of theatres in Atlantic City and Camden, New Jersey, unseen before in working class America.¹¹ The moldings and decorations are highly artistic. In addition to its architecture value to Millville, it is truly significant to south Jersey because all of the theatres in Atlantic City (and very probably Camden also) that the Levoy had been compared to have been torn down due to Camden's urban blight and Atlantic City's casino uprising. The Levoy is truly a rare surviving example of a wonderfully built, artistically crafted downtown movie theatre of the early twentieth century, and definitely is worthy and in need of preservation attempts.

NOTES

¹ Martin C. Weber, ed., Millville, New Jersey Centennial Souvenir (Millville, New Jersey: Millville Centennial Corporation, 1966), 10.

² Ibid., 64.

³ Ibid., 64.

⁴ "Ten Years of Progress Marked by New Theatre," Millville [NJ] Daily Republican, 18 September 1927.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "'Theatre Beautiful' is Ready for Grand Opening," Millville [NJ] Daily Republican, 18 September 1927.

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⁷ "Warner Brothers Take Over Houses," Millville [NJ] Daily Republican, 28 May 1930.

⁸ "Eyeflow Design Enhances Beauty," Millville [NJ] Daily Republican, 18 August 1939.

⁹ "Eyeflow Design Enhances Beauty," and "Levoy Feather in Cap for Several Local Contractors," Millville [NJ] Daily Republican, 18 August 1939.

¹⁰ Joyce Vanaman, "Shaky Eave Taken Down From Theater," The Press (Atlantic City, New Jersey), 8 July 1972.

¹¹ "'Theatre Beautiful' is Ready for Grand Opening," Millville [NJ] Daily Republican, 18 September 1927.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Block 416, Lot 3.

VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Levoy Theatre, except for the small empty lot along the northwest side of the theatre, between the theatre and Pine Street. This lot at one time included several small buildings, which have been demolished many years ago. The empty lot is currently part of the parcel.

PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information is identical for all of the enclosed photographs:

1. Name of the Property: The Levoy Theatre
2. County, City, and State where located: Cumberland County,
Millville, New Jersey
3. Name of Photographer of modern photos: Joseph H. Pierce Jr.
4. Date of Photographs: Modern: 1/98, Historic: as dated below
5. Location of Original Negatives: Joseph H. Pierce Jr.
Director of Conservation
Levoy Theatre Preservation Society
618 E. Main Street
Millville, NJ 08332
- 6 & 7: Description of views; number of photograph: within the
following pages.

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Modern Photos:

EXTERIOR:

- 1 of 45: Overall view of High Street and the Levoy Theatre.
Looking SW.
- 2 of 45: Main facade of the Levoy Theatre. Looking WSW.
- 3 of 45: Main facade of the Levoy Theatre. Looking NW.
- 4 of 45: Main facade of the Levoy Theatre. Looking SW.
- 5 of 45: Closeup of Facade, with detail of marquee and gothic
window. Looking W.
- 6 of 45: Marquee and Facade of Levoy Theatre. Looking NW.
- 7 of 45: Detail of Facade ornament. Looking NW.
- 8 of 45: Side (northern) wall and roof of back half of Levoy
Theatre. Looking SW.
- 9 of 45: Side (northern) wall of theatre. Looking SE.
- 10 of 45: Back wall of theatre (stage loft wall). Looking NE.
- 11 of 45: Alley walkway on south side of theatre, showing south
wall and balcony fire escape stairway. Looking W.

INTERIOR:

- 12 of 45: Proscenium from the balcony. Looking W.
- 13 of 45: View of Proscenium arch and orchestra seating from
orchestra level. Looking W.
- 14 of 45: Looking into the auditorium from the center of the stage.
Looking E.

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- 15 of 45: North wall of the auditorium, showing the surviving 1939 tapestry, including the illustration of the earth. From the stage, looking NE.
- 16 of 45: Closeup view of the globe tapestry on the north wall. Looking N and up.
- 17 of 45: The south wall of the auditorium, badly damaged by water. Parts of the 1939 tapestry survive, but deteriorated. Looking SE.
- 18 of 45: Ceiling ornamentation from the center of the stage. Looking E and up.
- 19 of 45: Detail of decorative ceiling fixture from 1927. Looking up.
- 20 of 45: Detail of decorative ceiling lighting fixture. Looking up and SW.
- 21 of 45: A few rows of existing seating on the orchestra level, from 1939. Looking SE.
- 22 of 45: Existing lobby; old concession stand area to the left, access to the auditorium to the right. Looking NW.
- 23 of 45: View of last remaining "half moon" doors at the entrance to the orchestra level seating. Looking NE.
- 24 of 45: Proscenium archway and stage. Looking W.
- 25 of 45: Close-up view of the decorative carving above the stage proscenium; also shown at the lower end is the keystone of the proscenium arch. Looking up and W.
- 26 of 45: Capital of pilaster and surrounding frieze of north side of proscenium. Looking up and NW.

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- 27 of 45: Doorways on orchestra level, north side of the front of the stage. Towards the left was access to former box seating area, right doorway led to an emergency exit. Looking up and NW.
- 28 of 45: Existing balcony staircase from lobby. Looking NW.
- 29 of 45: Part of the modern apartments on the mezzanine level. Looking SE.
- 30 of 45: Lower half of the balcony, with existing 1939 seating. Looking SW.
- 31 of 45: Upper half of the balcony, towards the projection booth. Looking NE.
- 32 of 45: Both of the vintage 35mm motion picture projectors. Looking NW.
- 33 of 45: Close-up of one of the vintage 35mm motion picture projectors. Looking SW.
- 34 of 45: Backstage area. Looking N.
- 35 of 45: The large prop doorway in the backstage area. Looking W.
- 36 of 45: Corridor of vaudeville-era dressing rooms. Looking S.
- 37 of 45: Interior of a dressing room, showing porcelain wash basin and original door. Looking NW.
- 38 of 45: Original boiler for the Levoy. Looking NW.
- 39 of 45: Water pump once used for "scientific air-conditioning" in the Levoy. Looking SW.

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HISTORIC

- 40 of 45: The original Levoy Theatre, circa 1908, with William "Pop" Somers, the original owner, standing near the front doors. Looking W.
- 41 of 45: View of the west side of High Street, between Pine and Sassafras Streets, with the original Levoy Theatre in the center, circa 1911. Looking SW. Compare with photo number one.
- 42 of 45: Construction of the second Levoy Theatre, 1912. Stone foundations and brick walls from this building still exist in the present structure. Looking W.
- 43 of 45: Facade of the third Levoy, 1930. The present facade dates back to 1927, during an enlargement of the theatre. Note the man sitting on the flag pole on top of the theatre. Looking NW.
- 44 of 45: Interior of the third Levoy, circa 1927. Viewed from the stage, the capacity of the Levoy was at its peak of 2,000 seats. Compare with photo number fourteen. Looking E.
- 45 of 45: Owner Simon Cherivtch standing out front of the Levoy in 1959, a year before he reduced the size of the lobby to create two retail stores. Looking NNW.

LARGE - SCALE SITE PLAN

PINE STREET

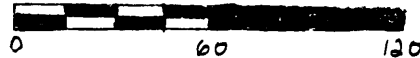
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REAR

LEVOY
THEATRE

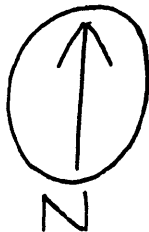
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SCALE: 1" = 60'



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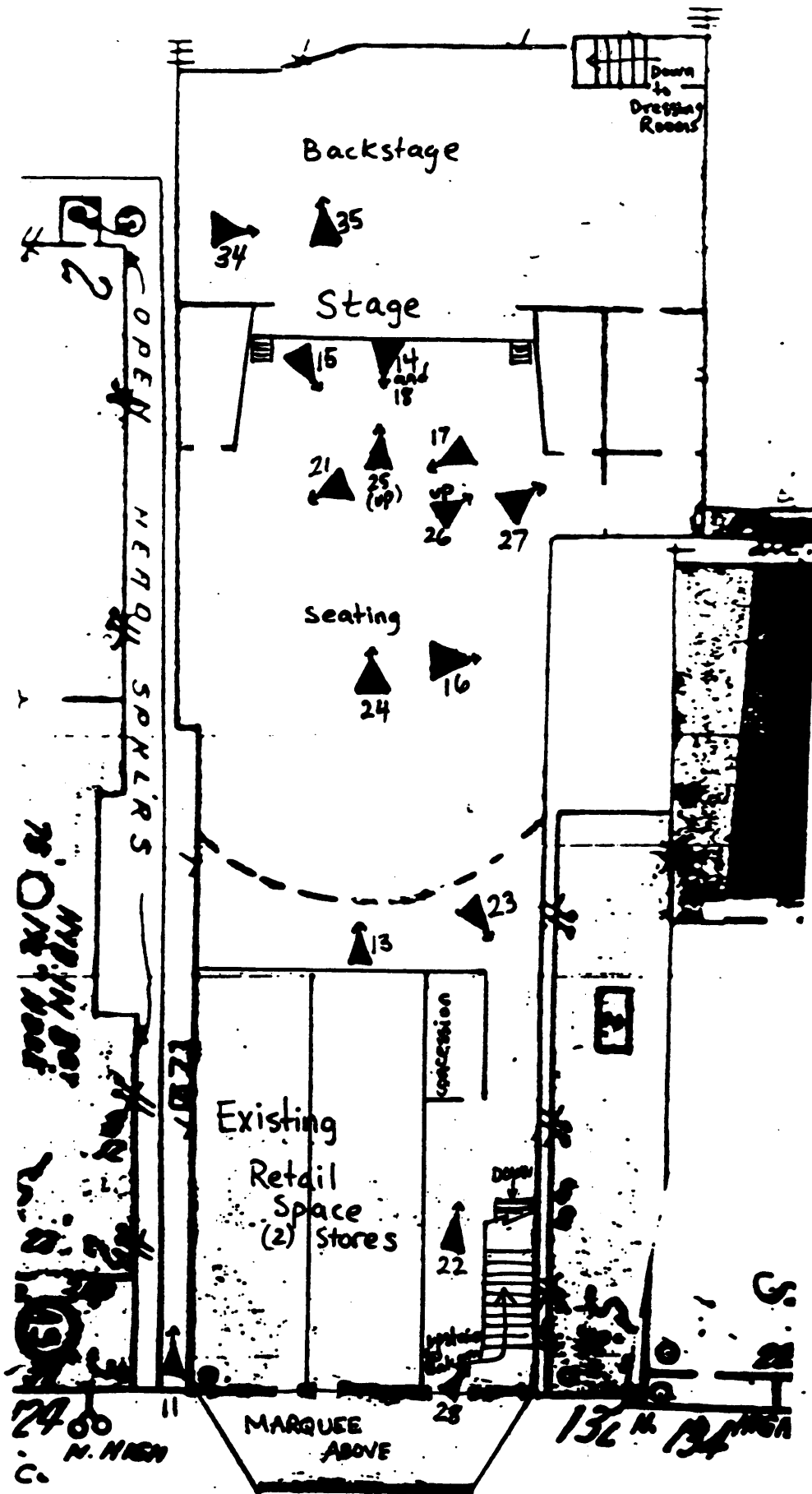
PROPERTY: LEVOY THEATRE
DATE PREPARED: 23 AUGUST 1997
PREPARER : JOSEPH PIERCE JR.



BLOCK: 416
LOT: 3

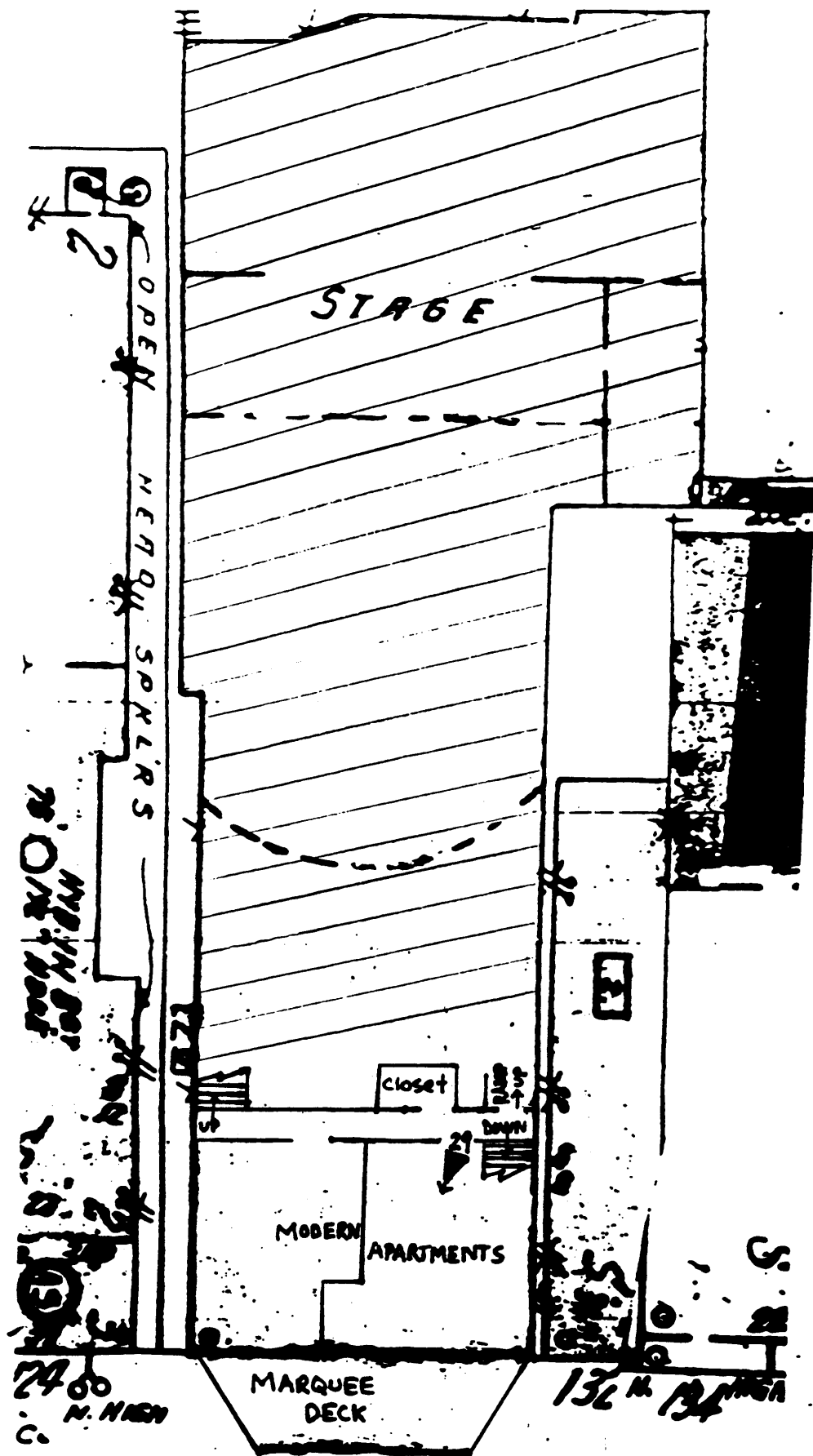
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MILLVILLE, NJ
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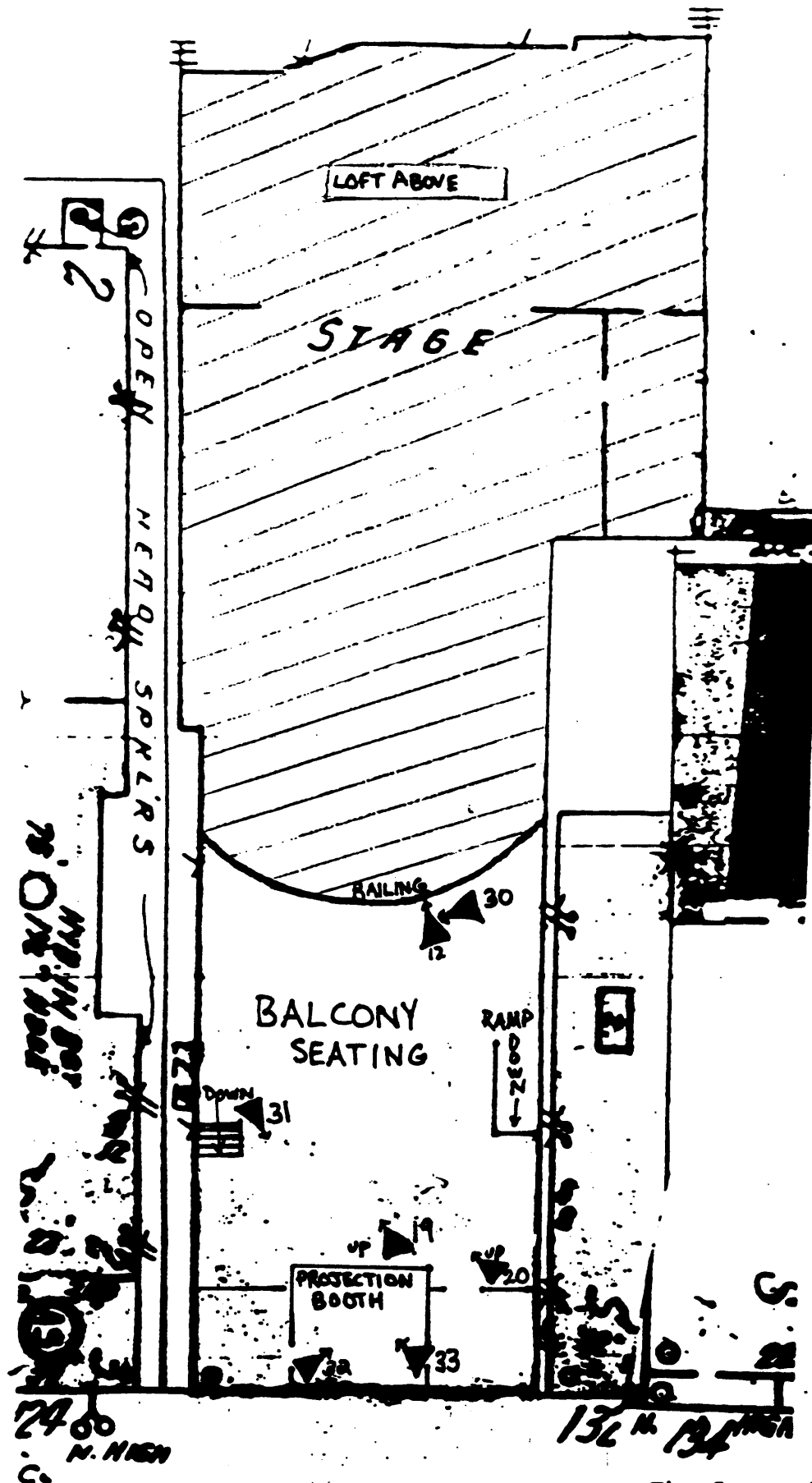
The Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County
Millville, New Jersey

Main Floor
(photographs)



The Levoy Theatre
 Cumberland County
 Millville, New Jersey

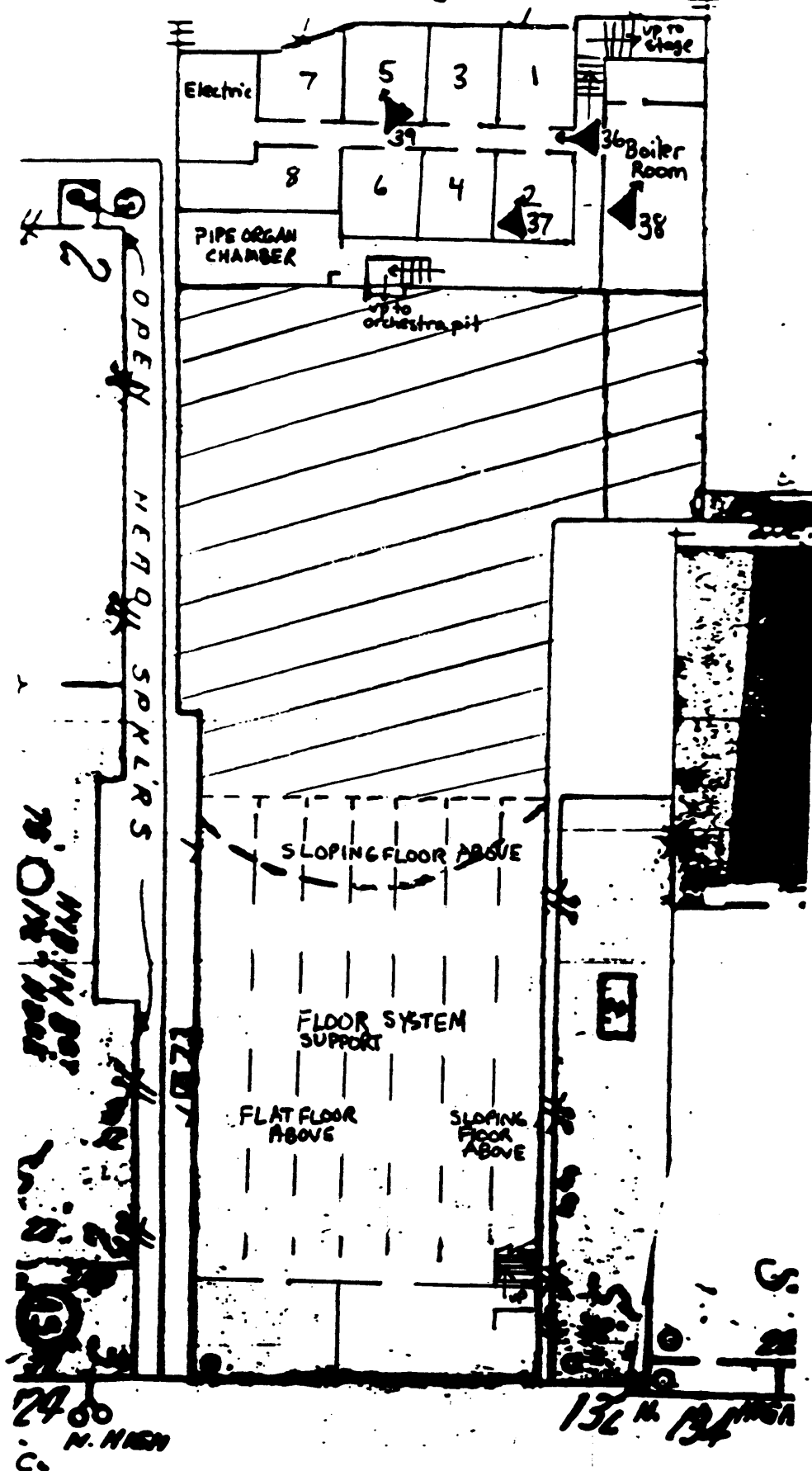
Mezzanine Level
 (photographs)



The Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County
Millville, New Jersey

Balcony Level
(& Projection Booth)
(photographs)

Rooms 1-8: Dressing Rooms



The Levoy Theatre
Cumberland County
Millville, New Jersey

Basement Level
(photographs)